PREPARED FOR THE IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

"NO BRIDGE, NO TOWN"

Oral Histories on the Historic Snake River Bridge and the Town of Marsing

A project in conjunction with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office and the Owyhee County Historic Preservation Commission

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"So the Marsing brothers bought forty acres of land at the end of that to start a town. So it's said that Marsing is the town that the bridge built..."
-John Larsen

Interviewee: Betty Lou Stephenson-Archer
Interviewer: Amy Johnson
Transcribed: Heidi Coon
Date: No date listed

Betty Lou Stephenson-Archer was interviewed in 2018 at the Owyhee County Historical Society Museum about her memories and experiences regarding the Marsing Bridge and the town of Marsing location in Owyhee County, Idaho.

Amy: I am here with Betty Lou Stevenson Archer and just to get started. Betty where were you born?

Betty: I was born in Nampa, Idaho in 1931 and I came home to Marsing. My father and mother lived in Marsing at that time.

Amy: So you've lived in Marsing for most of your life?

Betty: Until I graduated out of high school and married, yes.

Amy: Okay. And so what do you do for a living now?

Betty: I'm retired. I am 87, so I'm retired.

[both laugh]

Amy: So, how long had your family been in the Marsing area?

Betty: My grandfather had a farm under Lizard Butte and they came there in about 1908, 1909. My father was born in 1905 and it was shortly after that, that they had the farm right there under Lizard Butte.

Amy: Okay, so you probably remember hearing about the ferries to cross the river there?

Betty: Oh yes.

Amy: Froman's Ferry was one of them. Do you remember any?

Betty: I know that my father had a bunch of Indian arrowheads and things like that. And there was actually, down on the river from the farm, 'cause the farm went from the riverbank to the highway under Lizard Butte, and there was, more or less of a ferry crossing right there.

Amy: Okay. And that took care of the next question about where the ferry was.

Betty: The main ferry was up the river past Marsing some ways.

Amy: Do you remember hearing about the construction of the bridge in 1921? The first bridge.

Betty: Yes ‘n no. My father, he didn’t help build it, but they were very prominent in building it—because soon after the bridge was built the family moved to Marsing.

Amy: So, the construction of the first bridge was a good thing for the area?

Betty: Oh yes. Because if you actually look at the maps. This is U.S 95 that goes to Winnemucca and such as that way, and a before that it was Highway 30, and it went through Boise, Nampa, and Caldwell on to Portland. And from down in Salt Lake, why it cut across and went to Elko, and back up to Reno, and such as that. And there needed to be some kind of a travel between Boise and Reno and Sacramento. And so building the ION Highway, that’s what made the bridge—is that they had to be able to cross the Snake River to come over the pass and build an ION Highway that came out at Jordan Valley. And my father helped build that highway—that he and my grandfather and uncle had the big boat plant and gas things there in Marsing. And they helped build all that highway going towards San Francisco, Sacramento, Lake Tahoe, Reno up through there.

Amy: So the bridge helped people get on into Californian and Sacramento, Reno, all those places; and then there wasn’t much of a town there. There was Claytonia and Henderson Flats and not much else until the bridge.

Betty: That’s right. In fact—the way the town was built, when you went across—came across the bridge from Canyon County, the first thing was the building of that Bill Bales had, and that was a big lumber yard, and he had his office and everything. Now you have to remember I am talking about the 1930s. I have pictures of all the places in the 20s and when it was first built; but in 1930, why when you came across the bridge, there was the lumber yard, and Bill Bales, and a big what was the spot, and underneath Bill Bales was Gus Brown’s Cigar Store, then there was a side street, and the Marsing Garage, and a café, and the Quintanas had their bar there.

On the other side of the street, coming back towards the bridge, was Volkmer’s or the mercantile. Motzko and Walt Volkmer had the mercantile and then there was the Volkmer Home, and then the Motzko Home, and then the Stafford’s Garage and Junk Yard, and beside that was a movie theater, the liquor store; and then across the little frontage street, there was a building that I can remember was a butcher shop, it was a grocery store, it was a little restaurant, pretty much everything; and then right square on the corner where the bridge—and going across the bridge Cusic’s had there barber shop. That was the town.

Amy: That was the town, and everybody else was farmers and lived out away and would come to town.

Betty: Right, and of course with the Volkmer-Motzko Store, that was the big mercantile. In

about I would say ‘36, ‘37 that all burned down. We had a big fire and because of that fire why my father, grandfather, and uncle built the tower that held that water tank—so that because of the fires.

Amy: So there wasn’t a water tower until after the fire?

Betty: No, until after the fire and then they had the water tower. But that was in probably like I said 1935, 1936. I can remember how scared everyone was, and that how on the Volkmer Home, and, Motzko Home, and our house, why they were on the roof with gunny sacks and water to beat out the sparks.

Amy: Wow, I think you’re the first person to mention a fire out there. That’s good, that’s the kinds of things we’re-

Betty: After the fire, and because the mercantile burned down, why then they moved across the street. And the one building across the railroad tracks, why that was the first Motzko Hardware and that had the post offices and such as that in it. But that was still in the late 30s. And but there wasn’t anything back there, other than the Nazarene Church and, of course, there was the warehouses that Jack Simplot had the first one. Edwards was down the rail road track, and then there was another warehouse up the river on what’s now Bruno Highway, and this was on the railroad side of the street. On the river side of Bruno Highway was my dad’s big boat plant and warehouse and such as that. And then on down my grandfather‘s big pasture and on the river was, of course, was the barnyard and things like that right on the river, because the property ran from Bruno Highway clear down to the riverbank.

Amy: That is a lot of property.

Betty: Yes. In fact the first block of Marsing, of course on the street side, and then there was an ally down through the middle, and from what’s now the Bruno Highway to the frontage road down here, our family had all that; and then there was another family across the street. And the Grandma and Grandpa Motzko built a house there, and pass that was grandfather’s barn yard, and barn sheds, and things like that, and the cows, and where he milked the cows, and the chickens, and everything like that, was on down and it went clear down to where Walker’s farm started.

Amy: Oh wow.

Betty: And that was on the up-river side. On the other side, why of course was the garage and behind the garage was my uncle and aunt’s home, that in the 40s they turned that into the telephone office. And then my aunt and uncle had the property behind there with—they bought the Motzko Grandpa and Grandma Motzko’s original house. And then they had that clear to the road with cabins they rented.

Amy: Oh wow, so you guys pretty much ran the town.

[laughing]

Betty: Yes, I was a brat, and yes I can't hardly remember any kids on that side of the town.

Amy: Well you had to—well you know, you had to entertain yourself somehow right.

[laughing]

Betty: And the river was the entertainment.

Amy: Did you and the few kids there play in the river a lot?

Betty: Yes. I had a younger sister that's three years younger than I. I don't ever remember her going down to the river or anything. But there was four or five boys and me.

Amy: So you were one of the boys?

Betty: I was one of the boys. We over the river, we had a beautiful great big elm tree, elm? No? Anyway a big tree with a limb that went way out over the river bank and we hung a big thick rope on it. Dad gave me the rope, and with the help of all the boys in town, why we put this rope up and we could swing way over the—Roy Herman finally cut the rope down and I think he cut the tree down to. Here in the last twenty years?

Amy: So you knew Roy Herman? I have heard his name but I have never met him.

Betty: I think he passed away a few years ago.

Amy: Yeah.

Betty: Oh yeah. Roy, he's younger than I was. But yeah, I knew him real well. I know I did not babysit him because no one allowed me to babysit.

Amy: [Laughing]

Betty: They's afraid I'd take 'um down and drowned 'um in the river

[Both laughing]

Amy: Well, you know everybody has got their own.

Amy: So bridging from the old bridge, 1921 bridge, to the current bridge that was built or completed in the early to late 50s. Because I have heard everything from 1951 to 1958 as to when it was completed.

Betty: Like I say, I had all of the news clippings and everything. I am not sure—I think all of

those news clippings I left at the Sandbar, with one of the—— and there was a huge big box full of, not a big box, but a box. I had a bunch of stuff I did not know what to do with, so I took it to the Sandbar and left it down there with them at the Senior Citizen.

Amy: Well on my notes I have split the difference and called it 1955. And that's pretty close to what the Idaho State Transportation Department said too.

Amy: So do you remember the dedication in May?

Betty: No. Because I was married and gone and by that time, I think we lived in Ogden, Utah. I go up to 1949.

Amy: Oh okay. Just before the bridge?

Betty: Yes. Because all the pictures I have are all——but everything that I have is all pre that. And then I've taken a lot of pictures in the last I'd say twenty years of the bridge.

Amy: Okay, so what are some of the shenanigans you guys what get into around the river then?

Betty: Well, first of all maybe you don't realize, that on the island itself, there was a home and a family lived there by the name of Stoutenburg.

Amy: I have heard of the cabin but no——

Betty: But this was actually a two story house.

Betty: And I have pictures of that taken in 1945, that it doesn't show the house but it shows were the foundation was and the trees around it. But in one of the pictures I have of the bridge in 1937 that was sent to my father, that has the ladder that goes down to the island. And it was a ladder that was just laid up against the bridge and you had to climb down it, and this is the way the Stoutenburg's went up and down from the island to the bridge. And then I have a picture of it in 1945, and it has the stairs that went down. And the reason that there is stairs and not the ladder is because I had done something at the garage, I have no idea what I did, but it made my father terribly angry, and I ran——and the only way to go was across the bridge, and so I started across the bridge. Now then, that would mean this was before 1945, and I would say that it was probably maybe 1939, it was before the war. And I went down the ladder, and so my dad could not get me, I pushed the ladder over and it broke the ladder all to pieces. And that meant that nobody could get down on the island. And my father waded the little part of the river, and the small part of the river was only thigh deep, it was never deep like the big one, and he waded that and came and got me. And had to build the ladder—— the steps, so people could get up and down.

Amy: And he probably built steps rather than a ladder so that it wouldn't——

Betty: Yeah, yes and so they must have been really, really good steps——because they were still

there in 1950 when I got married and left. It was the same steps.

Amy: Oh wow.

Betty: So and like a say I have the picture of 1945 of the steps. And with it in this 1945, I had always carried a camera with me from soon as my mother had let me have her brownie. Why I carried a camera, and I talked her into a roll of colored film, and it was probably seven or eight dollars for a roll of film, and it was my very first role of film. And I still have the negatives, you can't hardly see anything because of the kind of film it is, but the first pictures I took was of the bridge, and Lizard Butte, and pictures of the Marsing High School, and my high school formal.

Betty: But what else?

Amy: So over the years Marsing has grown right?

Betty: Yes.

Amy: And would you say that is because of the bridge? Because so the original bridge was a two lane but for smaller cars than modern cars?

Betty: Yes, in fact, yes it has grown. Because here again, you have to go to the ION Highway and unless they come from the west and cut off there at the right out of Fruitland, and come across 95 through Parma and then through Wilder and that way. Why they would cut off in Caldwell or there at Nampa at the Karcher Road and the trucks would come the other way. Basically that's still the only route that is the short cut to Sacramento and Reno and that way from Idaho.

Amy: Yeah well that's as far as the standardizes questions. But do you have any more stories?

[22:30]

Betty: Well yeah. The bridge, after it was built in 1921, the way that they celebrated the 4th of July, is my uncle and my father dived off of the top of the bridge every Fourth of July. I never got to see it, this was twenty years before my time really, but that was the rumor. And Fred Thomson, his family was raised out towards Claytonia, out that way—and part of his family, the Wilsons, were out there—and every Fourth of July, he would come in with their big motor boats, those beautiful wood motor boats, and he would give everybody rides and everything on the Fourth of July. And along with my dad and uncle they were really close, good friends. And usually there was a big dance or something or other.

Amy: So was the dance hall pretty active when you were growing up there?

Betty: At Claytonia? Yes, Yes. That was, we spent a lot of time there. In fact, I think I was

probably fifteen, my mother made me go to the first dance. My sister, little sister wanted to go and I would have rather stayed and played with all the boys. But after that, why Claytonia was the hang out for us all, and it was run by the Johnstones and the Martinats, and they had boys too. But we spent a lot of time at Claytonia—Shipperies [?] [Shivaree]. The rule was, at our house, that you didn't go out. There was fights in the parking lot, there was all kids of goings on out there, and you stayed inside, if you didn't, you were grounded and you couldn't go back. And if I had done anything I shouldn't of, my mother would have known it before I got up in the morning. That either Dorothy Martinat or one of the Johnstones would have already called.

Amy: So you didn't even have the chance to get into trouble there?

Betty: No, not at that time. You could stand on the porch with Levi and Dorothy and watch the fights from the porch and from the steps and there was some pretty good ones.

Amy: You know these dance halls, everybody talks about them but no one ever really share their stories.

Betty: One nice thing about it, we were really taught how to dance. And the rule was that you danced with whoever asked you, unless someone had asked you before. And if you were sitting there, and someone came up and said, "Will you dance with me" and if you absolutely didn't want to, you sat that dance out. You didn't accept somebody else, unless it had been prearranged, and that meant that you danced with the old guys, the old ones. And they taught you how to waltz and how to two step. So at fourteen, fifteen, years old dancing with an old man you really learned a lot. And they were good dancers, my they could waltz. And the band that they had, they could just about play anything. It was nothing like the dances today—and the boys were really nice—and there was some odd things happen. And usually mother, until I was able to drive, mother came out at midnight. And they—.

[28:20- Interview interrupted]

Amy: Your mother would come out about midnight until you could drive?

Betty: Yes, and they stayed on open—they had a little supper. Took about half hour for the band to break, and the Johnstones and the Martinats had—there was sandwich, and a piece of cake, and punch something like that to drink, and others that had coffee. But after they started again it got pretty wild, because, of course, this was Saturday night and people would come from Nampa and Caldwell, and it was really no place for fifteen, sixteen year old kids. So pretty much it was later when we could drive, when we were actually dating boys, and things like that, we could actually stay later than midnight, but it was real fun place. It was too bad they closed it but times are different.

Amy: Is there anything else in your notes you want to mention?

Betty: Did they mention they had the Sinker Creek Dam broke?

Amy: No.

Betty: I have pictures of that. Not of the dam breaking, and I believe it was in 1942 or 1943 and the dam broke and, of course, that put a lot of water in the Snake River. And it was when that dam broke, that Bill Bales was out in his boat, and I guess, he was getting debris and stuff out of the water and fell in and drowned.

Betty: The photographer took a picture of the river in flood, and with the picture of the butte the bridge and it was a black and white picture, and then he oil painted it, and then my dad bought it. And so I have the original painting or the tented painting. And I know that there were three, because I have the original and I had made two copies, and had them hand painted. And I gave one to my father and I gave one to my mother, that gave it to Leland Sircin. What he did with his, I don't know. But I got back both dad's and mine, so I have those. And I also have all kinds of pictures from my aunt's album of the farming methods down under the Lizard Butte, and pictures from Lizard Butte itself of the valley. From her album. then on top of that, I also have the deeds and the water rights to Deer Flat Reservoir for that piece of property that is actually signed by the president of the United States.

Betty: Probably, you know bridge consists of three islands?

Amy: I did know that.

Betty: That the first island—alright, up the river, the first island was a real shallow island and the water that went between it wasn't more than knee deep. You'd go across it with walking stones, you know, you could walk across it. And it was full of willows and such as that, us kids played in that a lot. And then the other island, on the down river side, it was pretty fast and pretty deep, and to get on to that island, you had to have the boat. And we would take the boat that Bill Bales had, and would take it and go to the island. He let us do that. And mostly we didn't go over there unless there was a group of three or four or five of us one person—.

Amy: There wasn't a reason to go?

Betty: No, other than I celebrated my fifteenth birthday in a cave on that island. We played a lot on the river. All along the riverbank was trails for fisherman and you could go from under the bridge along the riverbank clear up to—well, is the beet dump still up there?

Amy: I think it is.

Betty: Okay. Right across from the beet dump was the Walker place, and you could actually, where that was on the river bank, you could actually come out at the sheep pens, and such as that. From the sheep pens on down from that, you didn't want to go because the sheep went down there. And we played all up and down that. And if you got real, real brave, and you had four or five big boys with you, you could wade from the small island

clear over to the huge, great big one that's up the river. And you always had to have a stick, a prod to make sure what was in front of you, and it would be waist deep that you could wade to that other island, but you never knew when the river was going to change.

Amy: So if you were brave enough, you could do it?

Betty: You probably heard that there was a stockyard, did anyone ever say anything about it?

Amy: No, not really.

Betty: They brought the sheep into the stockyards; of course, some cattle quite a bit. We weren't allowed to be playing around when the cowboys and the guys came in. But when they were gone, why we played tag on the stockyard fences. The way the stockyard fences were laid out, that there was a railroad track and then on either end was the big holding pens, on either end of the thing. And on the front part of it next to the road, was a long ally where they brought the cows in and with big gates on both ends. On the big holding pens—and on the railroad side, why it was up so that they could load the cattle into the cars, so there was a walkway, but not very much because they didn't want any of the cows to get out there, and the shoots went into the box cars that let out. From the ground, why there was a ramp, so the cows could go up there and go out the shoot into the box cars. But on either side of the stockyards were the two holding corrals, and on the side of the road there was big gates that went into the holding corals, and these gates swung 90 degrees, and they were hinged on the shoot side. Then on either end by the shoot, there was another gate that would close the shoot, and from—so there was one, two, three, four, four big gates, and these did the full half circle and they could close off the shoots, and you could get on one of these gates, and if you pushed hard and this gate was closed it would go clear around, and you could jump off, and you could run these. Top of the stockyards were big, 1 by 12s. Big enough to walk on and run on. And if you were really good at it, and this gate was going by, you could leap, and grab the gate and swing clear around, and we would play tag on that. And it was it was a wonder nobody got killed or caught—with my little sister, the one time she came over, she fell off and broke her collar bone, but mom never kept me away, she let me. And the kids that played on that, they run from college kids clear down to nine, ten year olds.

Amy: So everyone played on those?

Betty: Everybody played on it. It wasn't—and the big boys, the big kids were pretty rough, and they could swing it. They never tried to tag me because I was too little, you know until I got older. But the big boys could catch each other, but they let us little kids play too.

Amy: Well, I couldn't even imagine that—

Betty: But we didn't have television, we didn't have anything like that. The most we had was the radio with Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy and the different soap operas that your mom, your grandpa, and grandma listened to at noon. And the Green Hornet, and I Love a Mystery, and things like that—Amos and Andy. But what else was there to do?

We had our bicycles. Kids can't even go out and ride a bicycle today like we did. And we could pack a lunch and go out to Jump Creek Canyon. Take our horses or whatever we have and be gone all day. Kids can't do that now or they don't want to.

Amy: Yep, if they are able to, they don't want to and if there not that's what they want to do.

Betty: I don't know, I guess I wrote down here, fishing in the river and climbing under the bridge to get pigeons out from the nests.

[43:16 Interview ends Remainder of the recording was personal conversation]

Amy: You are the third person I have interviewed.

Betty: And who please?

Amy: John Larson and then Bill Williams. His father came back from the war and tore down the old bridge. So you're number three, and Roy Buckley is next on my list.

Betty: But if you could ever get ahold of her, Helen Motzko is still alive. She would be almost 100 years old now. My cousin's wife died last year, Barbra Hamilton. And Helen was at the memorial and she and her son, and her name is Helen Coffman and she lives in Boise. And if you could get a hold of her someway, she would really have the information and it was her dad and uncle that had the mercantile store and such as that.

Amy: I'll have to look into that to see if I can find her.

Betty: She was really coherent and doing everything.

Amy: That's incredible for 100 years old

Betty: Well she was born 1921.

Amy: I will have to look into that. Well, thank you for your time and for coming all the way out here to see me and chat with me.

Betty: I really enjoyed it.

Interviewee: Harvey Grimme
Interviewer: Amy Johnson
Transcribed: Heidi Coon
Date: July 23, 2018

Harvey Grimme was interviewed on July 23, 2018 in Marsing about his memories and experiences regarding transportation in and around Owyhee County, the Marsing Bridge, and the town of Marsing, located in Owyhee County, Idaho.

Pre-interview recording-

H.G: We had come across the bridge, right now it's the service station right now. Right where we got antique stuff that used to be the Ford garage. They had Model T and stuff in there. Down on Bruneau Highway down there, where I got some land down there, they used to store those cars and stuff down there. And as they sold them, you know you got a choice of color, black. [laughing] They didn't have anything else. But that was him and Archie had that. They had one of the biggest oil trucks that was original here in town. It was across the river right where Sherich [?] is, right kinda just round the corner. He found that, I don't know how he found it, but he found it, and got it and brought it back. I bought the towing service back in here. We had about four trucks, I guess—[unintelligible] they did the job, put two of them together and bring a semi or something around and [unintelligible].

[Interview Starts]

Amy: You are Harvey Grimme, and we are in Marsing, and where were you born?

H.G: I was born in Yankton, South Dakota, December 23, 1944. We moved here about nine months later. My dad worked for Robison Fruit Ranch over there, and also did his books and stuff, and taught school over here at Sunny Slope.

Amy: So you guys have been in the area since 1944 or1945.

H.G: In and out. I had to-my grandfather-first when my dad's twin brother got out of the army and said, there's a whole mess of construction going on in California. So we were out there for a couple of years. I don't remember for sure how long. And then my grandfather got sick in South Dakota, he was just an old farmer by himself out there, so we went back there, and I ended up going to school out there, and one year of college [unintelligible]. [Interview interrupted]

H.G: I don't know if you want any transportation deal, in those days. I'll try and stay with transportation.

Amy: No, so kinda of what we are looking for is what Marsing was like then.

H.G: Well, there was a barbershop down there called Brown's on that side of the street and—then we were—my dad was down there getting his hair cut, and somebody come in the

barbershop and says, “Hey Howard is that your car out there?” “Yeah.” “Oh, well there is a couple of kids out there trying to take the heater out of it.” You could buy a car with a heater or without a heater in those days. He caught them, I was asleep I was just a baby in the back seat. They were busy taking it out. There was only two bolts and two hoses to cut and it was out, so they were ready to take off with the heater, and he caught them at that time.
I don’t know, I am just going to mess around here and try and tell you a little bit of everything that pops into my mind.

Amy: That’s alright. So you remember the first bridge, the one that was built in the 20s?

HG: Yes.

Amy: I have been told that it had two islands underneath it and you had to go down a rope ladder to get across.

H.G: I can’t remember if it was a rope or a flimsy ladder, that’s what I would call it. I was never down there.

Amy: So you never got into shenanigans then?

H.G: Well the closest I came as a kid, there’s some people who lived down there, and they had some goats and stuff, but the island was not like we have it now, there just little round piece on one side I think, and little on the other, it wasn’t until later we started growing it.

Amy: I have heard a few stories from John Larson and other people that said there were lots of hooligans on the islands, but that was after people stopped living there.

H.G: We tried to have a park down there and over-night camping and stuff, but people kept tearing it up.

Amy: That’s too bad.

H.G.: I had some papers, I threw them away not too long ago on what we had to go through to get that—well I think I did—what we had to go through to, to get everyone on our side to clear out that government deal to get things done. They wanted to know if there were any Indian artifacts down there and all that stuff. Tom would look and see and we had a lot. It has been changed though, there was a crick going through it, it’s kinda got filled in over the years, some was from the river and some was from other sources.

Amy: So that first bridge, was it a one lane or two lane?

H.G: I am thinking it was like a one lane, probably room for two.

Amy: Two small cars or one big one?

H.G: Yeah. I don't think you──don't remember what the width is, they took that out in '64?

Amy: This one was finished in 1955.
So when they replaced the old one, were people pleased with getting a bigger bridge?

H.G: Oh I'm sure that helped a lot. They had, you know they were getting more traffic. They were getting more traffic from California. It was real a blessing when they put the ION up. I drove up there. I was on the wrecker and ambulance group. About oh forty years I did wreckers about seventeen on ambulance. Working with the traffic or Highway Department we saved a few lives after──of course explaining that facts of what would really help compared to the people who had the knowledge, but really was sad on the comprehensive thing, the facts, common sense.

Amy: You worked with the county as a coroner, right? You were on the ambulance crew?

HG: We had one corner down there on Highway 51 that──you drive down there?

Amy: Maybe.

HG: On down towards Riddle, at mile post bout 42, I believe it is, you're coming straight and there's so many curves that says slow down, slow down all the time, all of a sudden. And I got back there, started looking, we had about eight deaths on that corner in one year, mostly motorcycles. I got going back and looking and the road goes like this and over here you see the other part of the road, but right here it goes 90 degrees down and around and goes back up. So if you were just kinda looking at the scenery and stuff like that, you weren't seeing the full fact and all it had was 90 degree curve on the sign. We had had a lot of deaths with cars, pickups and stuff like that, that was going straight off over the edge, and there's big boulders there. And it wasn't until I got, I mean our coroners started seeing this and started talking to different people that worked on the state. Well that's not our problem, or that's not for us, you got to go over our head to do this and that. So I started to go over their heads. What they didn't realize is, you looked at it, there were just a few rocks about this big around that were sticking up out of the ground, on the side right where the motorcycles were going off this way, rather than off the bank. The bank on the other one about ten foot, fifteen foot drop, that's where all the cars were going off. They couldn't correct enough to get this way when they were getting ready for the turn. So we got rid of those big rocks first, and then they could go off the road as long as they steered one way or another. They'd go off that road and there was nothing down there. We cleaned that whole area out. So the cars go off almost just drive around come back up this side and come back on. But before, they would just get roofs smashed in, the fronts smashed in, and we had deaths. They took all these rocks out because when a motorcycle has a wreck, they fall down and they go on the ground and even with their helmets on, they hit these rocks that stick up the size of this glasses and that was enough to break their neck. Not looking at common sense wise, looking at more mathematical or whatever, it didn't make sense. I told them we need these rocks out of here first and now we need about three loads of pea gravel, so if it does, it will slow them down, and we haven't had a death to my knowledge since. And that's been several years.

There are a couple other places I raised hell about. We had a lot of deaths out here on highway by three mile right where you turn──

We had a death out there of a friend of ours. You know, after you're here for so many years you know people from one end to the other almost, starts to get to be horrible. Not as much of a job as it is a mental task, you know. It kinda starts bothering you a little bit. Anyway, he'd coming over the hill right there, and the road where they turned off on, on the edge of the highway it wore away, till there was a drop off, I took a paint can about this high and set it there, and that's how deep that whole side was. This guy's motorcycle went off and other wise if he was going cross road he'd be fine, if he picked another route, but he was going straight. Probably, you know you cover from here to across the street in 15 miles an hour pretty fast. Any way, he hit that, and it just flipped him over. He went way down in the weeds. They didn't find him for ten days, any way yeah, I got busy on that. Started with the guys right out here, I said, you know I follow the road all the way into there and all the way out there and that's the only place that does not have adequate coverage and nothing really went. And I finally contacted Boise, and said, this is a safety hazard, we have had a lot of death at that intersection. They finally got that extended and I don't think [unintelligible].

Amy: Well good.

H.G: The coroner can do some good, but knowing what the back story is, we had trouble with the sheriff's office not wanting us involved with investigating. With me having a lot of experience in auto-mechanics and repairs and stuff like that, I brought a lot more knowledge then they ever had.

On the old road up on the ION, we had a pickup truck one time that had twelve hundred miles on it. The tire was all shredded on the one side, twelve hundred miles tire shredded. Looked in the back and the spare tire was in the back, it was shredded. The pickup had rolled and he got killed. I started looking at the tires and the tires had chain wear on all four of them, where they chained it down on the railroad or wherever they chained it. They were rubbing against the tire and just wore holes in them, and they were all blue, sooner or later. So we took the two tires that were good off, and the other ones, we couldn't find anything, to tell you, it was totally just threads, and we turned them over to the family so they could see what they could do there, maybe get a new pickup or whatever. I don't know. That part I don't get into. If they needed me for to mount crosses for them or whatever, I already photographed that for them.

The ambulance crew could find spots in the roads that were having more accidents. I really wish that we could put──South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, we were up coming out Canada this way, and I don't know if they're in Idaho yet or not, and we were just driving around in what looked like Owyhee County, and down turn this corner here there's this little ditch right here in this corner and there was twenty-seven crosses, regular stake crosses. I sat there and counted them, and I thought I wish they do that──they do it South Dakota. If there's a death somewhere they put up this special

cross up that has a heart on it or something. I think that would be a fantastic project to get started. Makes you start thinking when you see that many of them sitting in one spot. But I have been here long enough that I know where.

Amy: Right, you know where and when.

H.G: Yeah, but it just doesn't seem to bother who you're trying to contact in the state.

Amy: Well that's just too bad that it doesn't bother them. So, were you in the area when they dedicated this new bridge, or the current bridge I guess, it was May of 1955?

H.G: No. I was probably in South Dakota.

Amy: So, you went to South Dakota to work on your grandfather's farm and then you came back?

H.G: No. Then I went to one year of college in South Dakota there, and then decided to go out to California, everybody else had. I was out there for two years and found out I could go to college. I just needed to buy my books, so I took auto mechanics out there, part of the University of Berkeley, so another little sub point—electrical engineering. I took a lot of things I wanted to know, not to really get credit for them. I just wanted to know that stuff. And then I—March 17, flower drought everything out there in California. I decided to go to Minnesota, don't know why. But then they had seventy-two inches of snow on the ground. And I got to work for Fire Stone for mechanic work for them. And then I got a chance to work for General Motors and moved to a dealership out there, and they sent me through General Motors School and then, about two years later, I quit and started my own shop. The guy that bought the building and stuff, he wanted to use it to have a gas station out front, a big one. He was already selling thousands of gallons around the corner. But the highway was changing, and they came through and they were going to take the buildings and stuff down, and then he died, his son died first and then he died. And he doesn't have interest in anything else.

And so my uncle out here, Julie [unintelligible]. I talked about, you know, coming out with my equipment and tools and the tow truck and forty thousand dollars or so worth in parts and stuff. It was all new, so I'd come out with that and we started to put a new shop up[?].

The old one, you can see through it, was warmed by twelve little portable engines[?] during the war for prisoners, and you could stick your hand through because it shrunk the boards, the boards were shrunk and got so cold you couldn't work in there most of the time.

Amy: When did you open up your shop down here, down the road?

H.G: I was with him for about four years. He and I got along beautiful, but you know, we just had differences of opinions on the other part of the family. 'Cause I wanted to buy it

whenever, I didn't care when he retired or anything. I just wanted to buy it. We got a good business going there and everything and the guy that owns this property right here, he had built that shop back there. And I was a young kid in town so the guys would call and ask me if I could come help them to do different stuff they had never done, 'cause the cars were kind of changing. They were going to foreign cars. So I come over to work and help them little bit here and there and then go back and work, so he appreciated me, you know. Kinda of deserving, being honest. He said I'm going to sell you my shop so why don't you come over, so he sold me his shop and I wanted to leave the tow truck over there and, you know, I didn't have that much land any way, two days later his wife which was—
[interview interrupted]

So I started that shop there, and I got another the tow truck. And I was waiting over by Dobins Implement, right here in the corner, and this come up for sale first, the lumber yard, so I had my own parts store down there, the only parts store in town. I had my own parts store there for several years, till this came up for sale. So when it came up for sale, I jumped and quit the mechanics, so it won't be hard on my body, my legs and stuff hurt so bad, so I moved my parts store up here. My first customer was a Model T. [laughing] I was in there putting stuff away that day, they had a parade and after the parade the guy comes to the door and knocks and comes on in, and he says, "I need some parts for my car." I went back through my books and asked what he needed, he said, "I need a fan belt." That shouldn't be a problem, but Model T doesn't have a fan belt like what we had in those days, they were called a v-belt a flat belt. So I said, "you know, I think I know what would work for that," and went and got a timing belt, which is flat with teeth on it, and we put that on there and it was like 13 inches and it just fit perfectly. He ended up bring in the Model T, and parking it inside the store for couple years after.

Amy: And then you have just been in Marsing ever since? So how's it changed?

H.G: When, not really much happened during the late 50s or so, maybe a few more houses put in then, It wasn't till the Building Center really selling house here in town and buying land and so they finely bought and started building as many houses as they could here in town and it almost doubled in size then, and you couldn't go across the street down town there.

My niece was looking for some land and this was all the Building Center owned or had all that property and I didn't noticed they didn't own this corner, and they were thinking about building over here on Thomas White's property right across [unintelligible], drug store at that time, which would have been good place. I found out it was owned by a gas station company that had, you know, probably used to have gas stations on the other two corners and building garages and stuff like that, and we made a mistake of telling them and they bought it, otherwise I'd own that too.

Any ways, our fire department has come a long ways. The old fire truck we had originally, my uncle used to get behind it and help push it up the Marsing Hill over here,

'cause you know, fifteen hundred gallons of water in there, that's pretty heavy, that's like eight pound a gallon, and he'd push them to the top of the hill and then take—. My first ambulance call I ever went with was on ——they were building that new—where that big canal goes across the highway, they were putting in that new bridge. And I just happened to be here and ambulance went off and, we just always had volunteers, and couple people were EMT. And I started study for EMT and somebody told me I wasn't smart enough to be an EMT. Don't tell me I'm not smart enough to do something. So first call we were going in there, they were building that bridge and there were about three or four construction guys standing up on top, and we rushed down there doing something over the bank and we couldn't see what they were doing. Joe Van was driving the ambulance and he gets right up to them slowed up and everything, we got right up to them and hit the sirens, they turned around seen that ambulance all lights and they just jumped off over the bank. There were some interesting times, stuff we wouldn't do any more.

Amy: Sounds like it, sounds like it was fun.

H.G: I like the town, I'm just more of a loner I guess, but I like to get things done, I started fireworks here in town, I started the tractor, and art crafts.

I was the only here at one time at school, arts and crafts at the school (?) [32:25-32:45 is almost unintelligible] I was the one—.

Amy: You started all that.

H.G: What?

Amy: You helped anyway.

H.G: I was the only one doing anything on the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber just kinda died out. Trying to think, 70s something like that, we lost some guys that were good workers and helpers, and that's when [a name but unintelligible] left that owned this over here.

Anyways, one year I was just working out of the shop down there and I was on the phone all day calling to get people to donated trophies for this trophies for the art stuff. I would set up the tables. I was a one man Chamber. I did all that and took the money from the different stuff that we got entry fees, and thank god, we were able to make enough money to pay for the fireworks. We already had them, but they hadn't paid for them yet. I did that for two years and finally, you know, I heard some people complaining that I wasn't getting any money out of it or anything like that, and I thought, you know, I worked how many hours on this trying to get it going, and I though this year, if you guys want it, you do it. My kids are getting older and I haven't been on any vacations for I don't know how many years, I says, I'm going to take my kids. We're going to go Disneyland out in California for a couple of weeks —and that's about when I am leaving, I can give you a head start if you want to know what to do, and nobody—and it kinda died over there,

and Homedale took the tractor pull and the fireworks and there was something else I thought about over there.

Why don't you eat a little bit. [to the interviewer]

[The recording was stopped about 35:20 and continues mid conversation]

Amy: Oh

[Background noise makes sections of interview almost unintelligible]

H.G: One year a semi load come from South Dakota, come up Highway 70, this guy goes, "we need to go to Spring Valley, Silver City is right here, let's go to Silver City and well drop off into Jordan Valley." There was no road made for semis. They got up there, and by the time they got to Jordan Valley, they were just—their knuckles and their hands were just white from holding the steering wheel. [laughing]

Amy: And this was one of those big semi-trailers trying to go to Jordan Valley through Silver City.

H.G: And when they got to Jorden Valley, one of the guys said. "How'd you get there through the mountains down?" [laughing] That was another road mistake.

Amy: Even today people try that stuff and regret it.

H.G: We had a guy from California who wanted to go see Silver City. He was kinda a rock hunter and stuff. He had little Dotson pickup, I believe it was. He was on the oil road leaving Murphy. For about three miles it was oil for a while on that flat part, he rolled his pickup there, straight road everything he just went through the wrong spot. I went up and got him, brought down, and push the celling back up, and put windshield in for him. He got gas and went back up, he made up that time. He called me and said, "I'm going to be back next year, so you watch out for me," I was like okay. Next year he called me, he had made it all the way to Silver City, but you know, those ruts, he dropped down and tore out the bottom of his gas tank, so I had to get him.

Amy: Don't understand why people try that.

H.G: I was in the city of Compton for a while, for about twelve years.

[editor's note: topic back to Marsing]
[unintelligible] I only had five thousand dollars to work on parts and stuff. That's to buy lawn mowers and everything.
That's when we kinda started putting little more dirt down there. The council did not understand that when you have river here, your river water is just underneath the island and islands only like two foot tall and the river water—basically that's the water shed right there, especially if you have a pond on this side. And the big motorhomes couldn't

get under the bridge to get to the other side of the park, and they wanted to make it deeper so they could go through. I said, you can't do that, it's going to wash out. You're going to have to put rock or something out there. Well why don't we go out by Gustafson's—do you know where they're at?

Amy: I don't know where they're at.

H.G: Just right here by the intersection by the bars right here, turn about three quarter of mile. There's a whole bunch of great big huge buildings out there holding chemicals. They were going to go out that way and come in across the back area, and it's a swamp to get to the other side of the island. It was going to be about three hundred thousand dollars. Or they could have went out this side of the bridge, but if they would have done that, they would have filled in just about half of that pond there. I had that pond already to—Simplot and— he says he had three thousand divers in the area training. They wanted to dig it out about thirty-five feet deep so they could do there training [unintelligible]. If you go down there right now, there's all kinds of water running off that thing, doesn't look like it. We wanted to dig that out, but that never happened. What else can I tell you?

Amy: I don't know, I was just wondering the same thing. I think you pretty well covered it.

H.G: These houses right here behind—those little houses about as big as this here, that's what most of the houses were like here in the early days. And the cattlemen used to feed cattle down here right by the bridge. That's the year they had a lot of bad storms and stuff.

Amy: Yeah, I think you pretty well covered it.

[42:30]

H.G: I went as coroner. I went to Saint Louis Medical School. Went through their death investigation, went there three times, finally got their masters, ended up with their masters. I went to Louisiana, there training they have there, and I went down to Albuquerque because I figured they had about the same kinda area we have there, down there. I got to go to Canada.

Amy: Did you go to the body farm in Canada?

HG: Is that in Canada or is that in Tennessee?

Amy: I know there might be one in Tennessee, I though Canada has one too. Where they, people donate their body to science.

H.G: I know about—I didn't know there was one—. That's in the United States I think is in Tennessee or someplace. I have never been there, but it would have been fascinating. I find that very fascinating. I've got a sick mind. It's interesting for us.

Amy: Interesting for us to see how long and how—

H.G: And for how long. Just like that guy that went off out here, he's got a lot of family here, that's why I am careful of names. He was there for ten days.

All the times we were doing our training and stuff, we did entomology, study of bugs and stuff like that. You could date and see where there date—you could figure it out just perfect.

Dentist in Caldwell that would helped me a little bit with teeth—several—most of them hand been in jail at one point. One guy had been arrested and had been in eight different prisons, and the FBI still didn't know his real name and history or anything like that. It took me, I think it was three weeks, and I traced him down, and I traced him down to a school he went to. What he was doing when he moved around the country—if he moved here on Maple, he'd put his last name down as Maple. I went through all the different—kinda of like that—and finally I called this one—I made a lot of phone calls, and this one school and I don't know how I got the information from them, the superintendent was a student when this kid was in school and I said, "do you have any way of identifying, year books or something like that, I didn't think so, any way of identifying" he said, "well he had his ring finger ripped off at school," saw or something. That was enough. I zeroed in little bit more, little bit more. One case we worked on for almost seven years. I don't have any cases that wasn't unsolved.

Amy: Well that's good.

H.G. About couple places, you know, about transportation, it would really help or if they would meet with the coroners. We established a coroners association. I didn't really put it together wholly.

But when I became a coroner, I got a letter from the Sheriff's Office, saying were going to work with you over bla bla bla and wanted to know what you're going to do, so I went to Canyon County, and Ada County and I got their protocol. I took their protocol and it was the same thing. All's I did was change Owyhee County in there, and my wife typed up about fourteen pages, twenty pages, and I sent it to him, and I don't know how they got it so fast. I remember going out that one night, might have given it to a cop to bring down. But he and the prosecutor went down there when I opened the store up, he's like, we need to talk. "What's wrong?" Well he opens it up and he's got it all blacked out. You can't do this, you can't do this, you can't do this. I says, "I can't?" And I looked at the prosecutor and prosecutor said, nope can't do that. After twenty, thirty minutes, of listening to what I couldn't do, I told them, "I think we're going to have a problem. I intend to do this job legally as I can and to the utmost efficiency that I can, and everything you've crossed off I can do, and you have no say on this." "What do you mean?" "What you missed, and it's right on each page, is Idaho section of the state law for the coroner." And they kinda fluffed out of there. We got a little tension there, but I knew I was right.

I had some at the beginning I'd call to get the Sheriff to come 'cause I wanted to see if I could get any history from them about this one guy who was an alcoholic, which he was.

I always say I fought about it. His mom was on the floor of her house, she had nicks, stuff like she had been beat over a period of time covered in burses. And I told the—matter of fact a funeral home, I told them, I wanted her kept until I could get the information from her doctor, find out what she had, colon problem or what. He and the son got together and had her cremated. I had them closed. The funeral home closed. I write to the state commission and told them this was not the first time I have had a problem there, but it's going to be the last, and they pulled their license. I guess I fought for what I thought was right.

Amy: That is admirable.

H.G. It hits you after a while though because of the fact that you have so many secretes in your mind of different things that you can't release it. I wouldn't give up anything I have learned or done, education all through life.

End of interview: 52:41

H.G: You're with the museum, are they going to get the locks I took down there up or are they still working on that?

Amy: The locks and keys that you donated locks and keys that are framed are up on the wall.

H.G: I didn't donate them.

Amy: The locks you have loaned are on display.

H.G: There's another older guy that wanted to donate stuff, and he said I have donated that this, that and my dad has and it's not up there. I said ill see about that.

Amy: We have to rotate through things and we can't have everything out.

H.G: I know we have talked about those antiques I found after you got the cabinets. I found an old lock, old key machine for Modal A/T, but it has patent pending on it; it hasn't been patented. It's about the same age's as the other ones I have. So I'm just kinda—there all 1900s, I have never—just two of them, I went through books and stuff like that—on the computer and can't find these two. Found others that they call old, but they're from the 60s. So I just found keys that are made for changing combination for a safe or for a bank. If you ever find a big long key like this, in the olden days when the doors would wear off, you put more wood on the door and the door would get thicker and thicker, and they would just weld the key making it longer and longer. Keys have been fascinating for me, so much has changed.

Amy: Well thanks Harvey.

Interviewee: John Larsen
Interviewed: Amy Johnson
Transcribed: Heidi Coon
Date: June 13, 2018

John Larsen was interviewed on June 13, 2018 at the Owyhee County Historical Society Museum about his memories and experiences regarding the Marsing Bridge and the town of Marsing location in Owyhee County, Idaho.

Amy: Well I'm here with John Larsen. So John can you tell me where you were born?

John: Born in Glendive, Montana in 1935.

Amy: How long did you live in Marsing and how did you get there?

John: Came to Marsing in 1941. We had come from Montana. My father got a job building what is now BSU [Boise State University] and we lived in Boise in 1940. In 1941, we moved down to River Side across from Marsing and 1941 my folks bought a place across the river and we moved over the river into what is now Marsing.

Amy: So you have been in the area since 1941. And what do you do for a living now?

John: Of course I am retired and trying to get all things done that I haven't got done up until now.

Amy: Sounds good to me. So what do you remember about the ferry or what did you hear about the ferry?

John: Well, the ferry that was closest to what is now the Marsing town sight was the Henderson Ferry. That was floated down the river from, I believe, from the Enterprise which is a town that was near where Givens Springs is at. It became the Henderson Ferry and that was the main form of transportation if you wanted to go from Silver City area to Nampa. This Henderson Ferry was your way to go, and the area was called Henderson flats at that time. Marsing hadn't been thought up yet.

Amy: Ok, so there was more than one ferry?

John: Right. And the reason the bridge is where it is, is the river is relatively shallow. So if you're going to build a bridge, you like to build it in shallower water.

The reason the ferry was up river, about a mile was 'cause the river was narrow. You want deep and fast moving water if you're going to run a ferry boat. Same if you go down the river to the same conditions and you'd find the Froman Ferry. That would have been used if you're going from Silver City area to Caldwell.

So the ferries made sense at the time. The bridge makes sense where it is because the river was narrow, I mean the river was shallow, most of it.

Amy: Ok. So what do you remember or remember hearing—since it was before your time, of the construction of the first bridge in 1921?

John: Well there was all sorts of speculation about bridges to be built because they obviously were a big upgrade from the ferry. Ferries could not hall that much, and they're relatively slow, and they went only one direction at a time, and a good bridge you can two directions at a time. So there is much contention and much speculation about who's going to get the bridge, and where's it going to be at, and so forth. And there was all sorts of meetings and discussions trying to get funding for this and that. And finally, there was a pretty much a decision to build it where the Marsing Bridge is now.

So the Marsing brothers bought forty acres of land at the end of that to start a town. So it's said that Marsing is the town that the bridge built, 'cause the bridge was there. And then we built this cultural shipping point there right at the end of that bridge.

Amy: So the bridge built the town. So the population changed, and where people generally accepting of the bridge? Or were they against the bridge, do you think?

John: Well, if you, if it was in your area you loved the bridge and if they didn't build it in your area you hated the idea 'cause you wanted the bridge. So it was well received, of course, because that was the shipping point. We had put thirty thousand acres of desert into irrigation, producing all sorts of fruit and produce, which you see to this very day—also the orchards across the river. Well you can have all this, but if you don't have a way to ship it or transport it, you see what I mean, how vital it is to have transportation to ship out the sheep that you grow and the apples that you grow and this produce. So this road was a big leap forward over the ferry.—And again—and the railroad also came in 1922 'cause they saw what's going on so they ran a spur line from Homedale. So now we had two ways to get the potatoes out of Marsing, either by the road over the bridge or by the railroad.

Amy: Ok. So over all the bridge was good for the economy of Marsing. It helped the farming community and it was a good thing, as long as you lived in Marsing.

John: Little anecdote you may want to delete. But there was a time about, oh, 1950, where they came surveying, and they started, and we noticed them up river from Marsing three or four miles, and then they kept surveying on down the river. Well, we were sure they were going to put in another bridge. All this speculation among the natives. Now they're surveying clear down here at Hoskins Road, and now they're going to put the new bridge down there. And later when I went to work for Gravity Meter Oil Exploration in Colorado, I found out that they had been up there and they had nothing to do with the bridge, they were running grid lines so they could make Gravity Meter Exploration looking for oil. But the people all though that there's another bridge coming in, so there

was all this. Now you won't believe where they're at now, they're clear down. We were sure another bridge was going in.

Amy: I guess were back so, so was there issues choosing the location for the bridge in 1921?

John: Yes. The last thing we were talking about was telling you about later on when Gravity Exploration was surveying, people thought a new bridge was coming in, which might be extraneous for this, I think that's where we were.

Amy: When the bridge was finally completed in 1921. Did the population explode or did it stay about the same?

John: Until the bridge, there was no population. There wasn't anybody there. Maybe there might have been one rancher or something. There just was nobody at Marsing until the bridge showed up 'cause there was no reason to have a Marsing.

Amy: Marsing was purchased, the land was purchased by the Marsing brothers and it incorporated Henderson Flats and Claytonia right?

John: What you call that was pretty nebulas, because Henderson Flats historically—and then the city was made, and they called the city, if I remember this correctly, they tried to call it Butte. Well, they couldn't do that because there is already a Butte, Idaho. So the railroad came in and they called it Erb, because that was the president of the railroad at that time and people did not like that. So it was 1937 and they formally changed the name of the town to Marsing. So if you want to be that way about it, Marsing did not exist till 1937 as an entity or as a village. A lot of times they went by their Claytonia designation because Claytonia was at the end of the Froman Ferry. So there's spillover from that see, and the train went through Claytonia to get to Marsing which is only a couple of miles away. So if you lived in quote, quote Marsing in 1924 you might use a Claytonia address, probably because that would have been the closest post office.

Amy: So the bridge really did build the town.

John: No bridge, no town.

Amy: So what was it like crossing the Snake River after or before they rebuilt the bridge in 1955? Do you remember crossing? I remember hearing stories about there being a ladder and island.

John: Okay, back up just a little bit. Crossing the river in the ferry was a slow and somewhat risky business. There was one guy who drove his Model T right on to the ferry off the other end in the river and drowned before they could get him out. So you're trying to have live stock, or anything—your ferry is this basically a raft that's got pontoons under it that you can turn twist it in the river and the current will make it move one way or another. So slow cumbersome, at risk, and some of them were poorly constructed in the first place. Until the bridge was there—that could have probably quadrupled the amount

of traffic that came through instead of sitting there waiting for this ferry to come back that was crossing the river with another load. So that was before my time, but that's okay, I don't miss it.

The original box bridge—two modern cars couldn't almost pass on it. Back when you had Model T, and that, the cars were smaller, two cars could pass. It was a two lane bridge. If a truck was coming you would have to wait till the truck cleared.

The bridge crossed over what we called Goat Island at the time, we had Goat Island and Rabbit Island. And the reason they were name that is historically is one had rabbits and the other one had a goat. So you see, we scientifically reduced that it was reason to call them that, because the current inhabitants, the majority of the population in this case was just one goat.

So now there was ladder to get down on to that island and as your only access—and I tried to jump off of it one time, I did so successfully, except my knee came up underneath my chin and about knocked my teeth out, so I didn't do that again but it was the quickest way down.

So but we used it as a playground for some of us kids. We were down there running around get bull frogs and all kinds of marvelous things—catch carp, life was good.

Amy: So did the island support the bridge or were they just man made islands in the middle of the river?

John: The islands were already there, they were used by the bridge. Again it was easier to build off of an island than off of open water, that's my assumption.

Amy: What other shenanigans did you guys get into on those islands or crossings or playing in the river?

John: I don't know how historically viable this is, one thing you'd walk up to the goat light a firecracker and stick it under its tail, it would clamp down on whatever was under its tale. When the cracker went off, the goat could go from 0 to 60 in about one second, made the goat kinda of hostile.

There was a shack down there, that I don't know who built it. There was nobody there in the 1940s. Sometime another there's been this shack there, and whether it was a barn or people lived in it, I don't know, but some of those days there wasn't that much differences, several of the houses in Marsing had dirt floors.

Amy: There was just a shack, nobody lived in it, nobody?

John: Not in my time. I never heard of anybody living in it. It looked like the shack. Looked like it had been built by a hurricane. It was in pretty rough shape.

But there was two islands and when they came back and rebuilt that bridge, they filled it in so now there is just one island but there were two.

Amy: Do you remember the re-construction of the bridge in 1955?

John: So happened that I was in the army when they did that. So I was not around to witness the event.

Amy: So that must mean you were not at the dedication?

John: Nope, got pictures of it.

Amy: Do you know anyone who was at the re-dedication of the bridge?

John: Nobody living.

Amy: So do you know if people were generally excited for the reconstruction of the bridge?

John: Oh of course, because now you opened it up. Now you could really have two lane traffic. It made a real big difference.

Amy: Well you already told me what happened to the original islands, they filled them in and made one. Is there anything special construction feature wise that you noticed? I know you were an engineer—— for the new bridge?

John: Okay, ask me that again.

Amy: What kind of bridge was the bridge in 1921?

John: The bridge in 1921 is what you called a box bridge. It was one of these that you still see a few of them around, where there was support structure was above the bridge not below it. There is still one of those up river up at above Walters Ferry; the old railroad bridge is that style of construction. That's the only one I know of that's left. That was the idea you built this bridge——you could of brought this bridge in and set it down on the pylons, they didn't do it that way. Modern bridge you build it on the pylons, the strength is under the bridge not over it, that was the main thing of this box bridge.

Amy: What style is the current bridge?

John: Well I can't give a proper name. A no box bridge [both laughing]

Amy: How did the 1955 bridge impact the area?

John: Oh not a whole lot, well no, it just made it easier to do everything. It definitely had a positive impact——the city did not double as a result of it.

The first time I was over that bridge was about 1936 because my grandparents had their golden wedding anniversary in 1936. We came down to that, and my aunt and uncle lived on one side, Marsing, and my grandparents lived on the other side. So I am sure I was across that bridge in 1936. But I cannot contribute any particular meaningful data from that.

[both laughing]

Amy: Do you have any other side stories? Not even just about the bridge, but about Marsing and transportation, anything from that area.

John: The town originally had five warehouses in it for shipping produce. There is only about three of them left, and once the railroad was gone they were not used for that. But there were these warehouses that were on the railroad track. At that time, we would bring in produce like potatoes. We would go out and pick the potatoes and bring them in what we called packing sheds. And packing sheds with potatoes were dumped onto sorting tables, and ladies, usually, would sort through them picking out the number ones, number twos, and culls, and they went on to the end of that and went into hundred pound sacks. The guys sewing those sacks, it was really an art. They could sew up a hundred pound sack in about three seconds, they had a perfect way they did it. It was fun to watch. Then the sacks were taken out and loaded on railroad cards, that's what we did. Famous Idaho potatoes were shipped out that way. But that was a big business, we shipped liked carrots and lettuce and all kinds of stuff in 1940s. And I think there were two reasons, one of them was we would run a truck to California to get oranges, that's what my uncle and my dad did in 1941, 1942. They would take a truck down with Idaho produce and buy oranges and grapefruit and bring it back up. They did that. But there's a whole lot of different needs.

And Marsing—the rail center was real busy in World War Two, because they were mining in South Mountain. They would bring ore from South Mountain down through Marsing to put it on the railroad 'cause of railroad siding. So you would have these big trucks coming through from South Mountain on regular basis, probably every day a truck or two. So you had mining going on, you had all kinds produce being grown and that was the main thing going on. A lot of many people came in, in the 1930s, and worked in that area because this area was opening up, where in the Midwest, was shutting down— the depression and Dust Bowl days, so forth. A lot of the Dust Bowl survivors wound up coming into this area or any area were they could get a job.

But the bridge is just absolutely vital, you know, it's not just another thing. If there's no other bridge wouldn't have been Marsing again. It would just shut her down, because you don't have a reason to go someplace, wouldn't be much reason to go there if you couldn't access Canyon County or going the other way. It's absolutely vital.

Amy: Well and Marsing is one of the few towns in Owyhee County that has its own high school and that's probably because the bridge sustains that population.

John: Yeah well, of course, Homedale too has a bridge, and of course that's the biggest town. People go where the work is. That's the reason people came to Silver City in 1865. There were jobs. People have to go to where the jobs are and we have jobs around there because we developed this farm ground, growing lots of taters, and we need someone to pick them and all this sort of thing. So that's the way it works. And then again when you get the tater picked, what are you going to do with it? You got to have transportation to sell it on to someone else, the whole thing flows together.

During World War Two, you know, our boys were off killing their boys, so we would put off school sometimes into October because we were out there in the fields picking potatoes and harvesting beets and we were the work force and that's just the way it was. You know, they had a few foreign workers come in, you had the German prisoners of war up until 1945. They were our work force, and then we had Filipinos come in, and there were Jamaicans, and finally we settled with Mexicans.

Amy: So do you know where the German POW camp was?

John: I have got an article about it that's written up here in the *Out Post.* I and Roy Herman did this, and yeah, we have pictures of it. Where it is, you cross the Marsing Bridge look off to your left and right and that whole thing was fifteen hundred prisoners held out there on about fifteen acre piece of ground. It was all tents and the only building that survives from those days is this green building. If you see that, that was the headquarters, the rest of it is gone now.

Amy: Do you remember the German POWs?

John: Yeah, I wrote up this thing. I watched the Germans marching across the fields, with they had beet knifes in their hand topping beets. Hitler's forces were attacking the field right next door to where we lived. Yes. I remember and Roy Herman, they spoke German, so they could talk to him. His parents were kind of the bookkeeper and liaison for that labor camp.

Quite a few people in Marsing spoke German, but during World War Two you didn't let anyone know it. Germans became Dutch, because the Dutch were are allies. So every German all of a suddenly became Dutchmen, nobody was a German. We would play war. "Well, who should we fight today? Germans or the Japanese?"—well we have our fake guns and this and that—, "Lets fight the Japanese"—"How come you guys never want to fight the Germans?" [both laughing] I talked to some of them about it later and it wasn't funny. It was not funny, they were seriously threatened. Well you know, they locked up the Japanese in prisoner of war camps. Nobody was a German anymore, no Reich, or Goebel, or whatever, they were desperate.

Amy: Do you know if there were several POW camps around?

John: Well it's a little vague because you keep hearing about these camps, but the main one was in Marsing. But what they would do, they needed bunch of workers south of Nampa,

so they would go over and set up a satellite camp south of Nampa, and then they would operate out of there. They say there is one in Nampa, but only during harvest. Right there were you come down Lake Shore you come on to Highway 45 right there, you probably go by that every day, right before you get there, there is a bunch of storage units and that was POW, where one of the places they operated out of for POWs.

Amy: I see. So the main camp was in Marsing and then they would ship the labor where they would need it.

John: In Parma, they needed some they would set up a temporary camp send a bunch of them to Parma, or where ever.

Amy: That's all I have unless you have anything else.

John: On the topic of the bridge, I can think of all kinds of anecdotes. I don't know if that is what they are looking for.

Amy: That's what they're looking for.

John: Well we would crawl under the thing some times. There's only one deep channel that was right off of the island. You'd go down there, go across under the bridge, right there is the channel. The rest of it is only this deep in the summer time. But you hit that channel, you could dive in and if you went down, it would take you down the river, and you'd pop up and the current would bring you back up. So if that was your thing, you could sit there and keep rotating on that. Lots of bullfrogs—take bow and arrows so we'd go down and shoot carp, and we'd venture off to one of these others islands. That one right up stream, when the low water, it's only about ankle deep, so it's not that big of an adventure. But this is it, there's certain channels, you got to remember where they are.

Amy: So you'd say you spent quite a bit of time playing in the river and hunting carp rather than fishing carp and catching bullfrogs, what did you do with the bullfrogs?

John: We turned them loose. We did not eat them.

Amy: No frog legs?

John: No we did not do frog legs.

Amy: You didn't harass the girls with them?

John: No. I may have tried one, frogs would have been sorry, I find out.

Oh, we would go down to the hardware store and get a bunch of chalk lines and chunk of led and some hooks, and then we'd probably have hundred feet of it, and put the led on the end of it, and swing it around your head, and throw it out to the river, set line, and then would come back once in a while to see if you caught anything. Then we'd run up

and down the river and do whatever boys do running up and down rivers. Yeah, that's the way we fished, we didn't have fishing poles that was too fancy. I guess we could have ordered one, I don't know. We fish with these set lines.

Then before the C.J. Strike Dam went in—it went in for two reasons, one is irrigation the other is it would flood every year. And that flood would get up to—when you cross that bridge—here's your bank and it drops down twenty feet where ever it was you go across to the bank on the other side. The water would get up to those banks at times, the whole island would be under water. You know, me and Cockroach, my buddy, we'd go down there and hang out and amazing what come floating down the river, outhouses, cows, you know, all sorts of things, boats occasionally. So we would snag a boat and we'd play with that, and hide it in the bushes. What were we going to do with it? Couldn't take it home, when your twelve years old and you got this fifteen foot boat. We would play with it down there, someone would eventually find our boat and steal it from us. We were really highly incensed that somebody stole our boat. Doing that sort of thing. They told us, don't swim in the river, so we always swam in the river.

Amy: Well no better place to swim right?

John: Well in the canals.

One time we had a gang war and these guys they built a fort over on Rabbit Island. And we decided we needed to have gang war because we had read about them back in the east and it sounded like fun. So we first needed to have a gang, so bunch of us got together. We were Gobblers Knob, because that's what we called that high ground. You come into Marsing and you go up into the hill and that's Gobblers Knob. The other guys were the River Rats. And so we were going to have this war, and we declared war, and nobody showed up but me and Junior Taylor. And that's kind of depressing when you only have a two-man army, it limits, some, what you can do. And these guys had this fort so that means you got to attack it. What's the use of having a fort if nobody attacks it. So we tried to attack this fort and there's about half dozen of them so we were vastly outnumbered. Finally I sneaked down and I got matches over my head and gasoline to burn down their fort, and I finally get there, and Chuck Kneeds threw spear at me and caught me in the chest and took all the hide off; but I dumped the gas on the fort and then my match got wet so I couldn't light it. I was driven from there. And then Junior Taylor is up there cussing and screaming around up there up on the bank. We had—our secret weapon was rotten eggs. I don't know if you had much experience with a rotten egg, but they become somewhat explosive if you have them around long enough. So we're up there hurling insults, which is our rebuttal. We had to hurl insults and rotten eggs. Junior came back and an egg broke on the side of his head so our attack was pretty much failure. And the rest of it these—

"Why didn't you come to the war?" "My mother wouldn't let me." What the hell is it? Your mother won't let you go to a gang war. We just didn't know how to do it, I guess that was the problem. First you should have a reason to have the war. We kinda ignored

that. We really didn't have a reason to do this, just what they were doing, these gangs back in New York were doing this, so we should do it. [both laughing]

Junior Taylor was── Okay, I am about ready to quit wasting your time. [both laughing]

Junior Taylor was a unique individual. One time we── the Marsing Youth Center, they just tore that down, all that stuff that's right there, you know, all that junk, the building, the hallow concrete block building was the Marsing Youth Center. So us being youth, went there. You know, we weren't quite sure what we were supposed to do there. They had two pool tables and a pinball machine. So you could either shoot pool or play pinball machine. So we youth went down there one time──Ernie Dickie was kinda the custodian, where if you cued the cue ball on the bottom it would hop off the table and it would hit this wall, that wall and then it would go into the spittoon and I'd say "ERNIE, the cue ball went in to the spittoon" of course he's furious which really made it worthwhile. He would dig us out the cue ball out, and pretty soon we'd do it again. Junior decided to go mad, so he goes mad, and he's underneath the pool table, biting at people when they walk by, he's frothing at the mouth biting at people throwing cue balls. They finally got him out of there, once he was outside where nobody was out there──[both laughing]

Going to write that up about the youth center.

Amy: You should write that up about the youth center. [both laughing]

John: Junior, he was volatile. His dad was the druggist in town, maybe he had the access to chemicals we didn't know about, possible. Looking for a possible explanation, that could be what's──. We kinda got away from the bridge.

Amy: That's alright.

John: Right, of course I gave you a copy of the other thing I wrote up.

Amy: Yep, yep you did.

John: Again it was a big deal. Yep. Just like I tell the story of Silver City. Silver City is gone, but the commerce it created and the fact they built the dam what it is today. If it hadn't been for Silver City bringing people in and creating a need, Marsing would probably look more like Nevada, most of it, nothing.

Amy: If that's all you got.

John: Well I got a lot more, but I probably given you the high quality stuff. Sit here all day and tell all stupid things we did. But I think everybody as a lot of those anecdotes.

Amy: Thanks for coming in and thanks for your time.

Interviewee: William (Bill) Nichols Interview
Interviewer: Amy Johnson
Transcribed: Heidi Coon
Date: June 18, 2018

William (Bill) Nichols was interviewed on June 18, 2018 at his office in Nampa, Idaho. He was interviewed about his memories of a story his stepfather told him about his job tearing down the old 1921 Marsing Bridge.

Amy: So, I am here with Bill Nichols or William Nichols, we are in Nampa in his office.

Amy: So where were you born?

Bill: I was born in Boise.

Amy: Boise okay.

Amy: So are you from the Marsing at all?

Bill: Not really, no.

Amy: Was your family from the Marsing area?

Bill: Nope.

Amy: So, and you're currently a lawyer.

Bill: Correct.

Amy: All right. So, can you tell me what you know about the bridge and how you're connected to it?

Bill: As I wrote to you in an email, my stepfather told a story of helping to tear down the old bridge that was replaced, the one that's there now. His story was, after he returned from after World War II he did a lot of kinda construction related work and a lot of that, was metal working, iron working, those kinds of things. So he was── I don't remember the name──that he ever said the name of the contractor, but he worked for a contractor that was tasked with tearing down the old bridge, and his job was to use a, essentially a jackhammer type tool to break the bolts that held the old bridge together. And so they were out over the river and he said──the story that he relayed was that the equipment was old. It was prone to break down and they didn't really have safety equipment and it was a pretty bad job, but it was a job. He, they drove from──they drove to the work site so they drove to the bridge from where ever the workers lived so they drove from Boise to Marsing to work on this bridge to tear it down. It was in busting these bolts off the old bridge and one time the hammer got away from him and he reached for it, lost his balance, fell into the river and swam to shore and quit; basically got in his car and drove

back to Boise. Took a job as a short order cook, he had worked as a cook before, and it was on Capital Boulevard right across the street from the car dealership. One of the car salesmen was in there talking to him and said you ought to sell cars, and so he went from construction to short order cook to selling cars something that he did for the next thirty-five, forty years, until he retired.

Amy: So he went from tearing down the bridge that was built in 1921 for the one that is there now getting ready to be removed to a car salesmen in Boise.

Bill: So basically falling off of the bridge in to the river was that was he was done with the heavy construction stuff, that was it, no more of that for him.

Amy: I don't blame him. So you probably don't know a whole lot about the bridge or the ferry before the bridge.

Bill: Nope.

Amy: So when did your family at least come to the area?

Bill: Well my step dad's family was in the area before the turn of the last century. He was born in Star, his dad worked on the railroad. Can't remember some time when he was in elementary school family moved to Tri-Cities and that's mostly where he grew up, but he still had family here.

Amy: Okay, so your family has been around for a while.

Bill: His family been around a long time. My side of the family, like I said he was my step father, my father's dad came to the area in the mid-20s to work at the sawmill at Barber and my mother's family came to the Emmet Valley in the mid-30s to escape the dust bowl in Kansas.

Amy: I see, well so it's entirely possible that your mother's family passed through Marsing. A lot of people came to Marsing or that early to escape the dust bowl because it was an agricultural community, But—

Bill: Yeah so on my mother's side of the family they had a, my grandmother had an uncle that lived in Emmet. And so typical thing, you stayed with family, they were actually on their way to Yakima Valley. They got to Emmet and found work so they stayed.

Amy: Well that works for them.

Bill: Pretty common for a lot of people, stay where you can find work.

Amy: Yep you have to go where the job is. So you probably don't remember much about the dedication of the bridge in 1955.

Bill: I wasn't quite alive yet, almost but not quite.

Amy: And no stories about it.

Bill: Not really.

Amy: Not really.

Bill: Just that he──

Amy: Just that he fell off of it and decided that was it.

Bill: That was it, he was done with heavy construction.

Amy: I guess that takes care of most of the questions though, because you weren't there around the dedication and didn't get into any trouble around the bridge. So the old bridge the one that was built in 1921, they had constructed two islands to hold up these pylons. They called one Goat Island and one was like Rabbit Island or something, 'cause goats lived on one and rabbits lived on the other, and that's most of what we get is young boys getting into trouble on these islands underneath the bridge that was in the 30s and 40s.
Do you think the new bridge the one they are going to construct will be a good thing or a bad thing?

Bill: Well you got to have sound infrastructure, you have to have good bridges. The one thing──do you know if bridge is already designed?

Amy: I would not be surprised if it wasn't already designed.

Bill: Communities can have an influence on the design of the bridge and what it looks like and whether it's utilitarian or whether it has some aesthetic features. If the design is not finished, I encourage people in Marsing to work with ITD to maybe make it look a little better. An example would be there's a relatively new bridge that was built in Cascade over the river on Highway 55 and also a new one in McCall where the dam is on the lake. If you have a chance to go, look at the differences between those two bridges. The people in McCall got involved in the design of the bridge to make it look better and actually have some places for public art and other things on the bridge where the bridge in Cascade is just utilitarian just concrete and some rims

Amy: Yep serves its purpose and that's about it. I would not be surprised if this was just a plain generic bridge.

Bill: Me too.

Amy: Well that's all I really have, unless you have other anecdotes.

Bill: I have nothing further to add, like I said that was the in the in my stepdads career that was the turning point, no more heavy construction for him. Fell off in the river and that's it.

Amy: Well thank you.